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ABSTRACT

The two studies present basic information about the families of hearing impaired children in the United States, collected from a national stratified random sample of parents of hearing impaired children in special educational programs. The first study reports on family size, hearing status of parents, and on the educational level and occupations of the parents of hearing impaired children as compared with overall population figures. The second study concentrates on family income levels, and demonstrates that many characteristics of hearing impaired children, including the type of school they attend, the methods of communication they use, the extent to which they wear hearing aids, and their levels of educational achievement, are related to the economic levels of their families. (Author)

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TWO STUDIES OF THE FAMILIES OF HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN

BRENDA W. RAWLINGS
CARL J. JENSEMA

ABSTRACT

These two studies present basic information about the families of hearing impaired children in the United States, collected from a national stratified random sample of parents of hearing impaired children in special educational programs. The first study reports on family size, hearing status of parents, and on the educational level and occupations of the parents of hearing impaired children as compared with overall population figures. The second study concentrates on family income levels, and demonstrates that many characteristics of hearing impaired children, including the type of school they attend, the methods of communication they use, the extent to which they wear hearing aids, and their levels of educational achievement, are related to the economic levels of their families.

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These papers were originally prepared for presentation at the 48th meeting of the Convention of American Instructors of the Deaf, Los Angeles, California, June, 1977.

As is true of all products of the Office of Demographic Studies, these papers represent the efforts of all members of the ODS staff. Writing a report for publication is merely the last of many steps. The authors therefore acknowledge their debt to all members of the ODS staff.

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THE FAMILY UNIT: A BASIC TO BE CONSIDERED

Brenda W. Rawlings

The child entering the educational process brings to that system many of the values and expectations of the family from which he has come. The experiences of the child with his family and as a member of the family unit will also contribute to his classroom experiences.

When the child leaves the school setting, whether it be at the end of the school day or the end of a term, he returns to his family to have his educational training either reinforced or eroded. It is therefore important for teachers and others working with children to keep in mind the fact that the child not only functions as a part of a classroom or school, but is usually also a member of another educational and social unit, the family.

Garretson (1977) recently made the observation that over an average year of a child's life, only about 8% of his time is spent in the classroom. Obviously, a great deal of the remaining time is spent by the child in activities with his siblings and parents.

The economic status of the child's family, the educational level and occupations of his parents, the parental age, family size and birth order are all important considerations in working with any child and are even more important for the educator of the hearing impaired.

In the spring of 1974, the Office of Demographic Studies at Gallaudet College conducted a survey of a national sample of almost 800 families with one or more hearing impaired children enrolled in special educational programs. The survey sought information on several topics relating to family characteristics.

Family Size

In the general population, the mean number of children in families with children under 18 years of age is 2.09 children (USBC, 1976a). Comparable families with hearing impaired children tended to be larger, having a mean number of children of 3.2.

The total number of children born to mothers of hearing impaired children in the sample is shown in Table 1. Data for women between the ages of 15 to 44 in the general U.S. population are also reported. Here again it is seen that women with a hearing impaired child tended to have more births than women in the general population.

The birth order of the hearing impaired child was examined, but an initial review of the data did not show any particular pattern of births within the families.

Hearing Status of Parents

Schein (1974) reported that 92% of deaf adults had both parents with normal hearing. This finding was also confirmed in the ODS study, where 91% of the students were reported to have both parents with normal hearing. Three percent of the students had two hearing impaired parents, and the remaining 6% of the students had only one parent with a hearing impairment.

Parental Education

The educational level of the parents of these hearing impaired children was obtained. Fathers of hearing impaired children tended to be less well educated than the heads of households for comparable families in the general population. Twenty-one percent of fathers with a hearing impaired child had an elementary school education or less. This compared to 15% of male heads of households in the general population with students enrolled in school. Similarly, only 27% of the fathers with hearing impaired children had attended one or more years of college, compared to 32% for the male heads of families in the general population. This information for the general population reflects the educational levels attained by male and female heads of families where there were one or more children enrolled in preschool through secondary level of education in 1974. Detailed figures are given in Table 2.

It was interesting to note that mothers of hearing impaired children compared favorably with those families in the general population which were headed by females. The mothers of hearing impaired children tended to be slightly better educated than the female heads of families in general. This U.S. comparison group, however, is not totally comparable, since it is based on the fact that a male head of household is not present, while for this study it is not known if a male head was present or not. (The ODS data were not able to be broken down by "female" or "male" head of household, since marital status information was not collected.)

Parental Employment

The ODS survey also sought information on the employment status of parents of these hearing impaired children. While 64% of the mothers of hearing impaired children reported that they were not in the labor force, in the general population 53% of mothers with children under 18 years of age are not employed. This higher percentage of non-working mothers of hearing impaired children may be attributed to the extra demands and special attention required by their hearing handicapped children.

However, over one-third of the hearing impaired children in this sample did have working mothers. This becomes a consideration in terms of the amount of time mothers will have to devote to their hearing impaired child's school activities, and also has implications for the need for after-school child care facilities for these children of working mothers.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the occupational classifications of the parents of hearing impaired children in this study and also of the general U.S. distribution of male and female heads of households. The fathers of hearing impaired students tended to have a similar distribution of occupations as the male heads of households in the general population, although the fathers of hearing impaired children had a slightly higher representation in the occupational classification of "service worker." Mothers of hearing impaired children were employed more frequently in "craft & kindred worker" occupations.

Conclusion

In a recent report ("House Panel Hears," 1977) to a Congressional Sub-Committee by the U.S. Congress's Office of Technology Assessment, the relationship between demographic characteristics of American families and educational systems was brought into focus. The committee heard that "the traditional image of the family with mother, father and several children" is now "at odds with reality . . . Rates of marriage, deferred marriage, increased divorce, and separation, as well as remarriage patterns, the size of households, the rates of their formation, and the growing number of female-headed households, are all radically changing the traditional environment of the child" and "must be considered when making plans and policy for education."

The social and economic factors discussed here may contribute to a better understanding of some of the forces at work in the life of hearing impaired children. Meadow (1969) has pointed to the powerful influence of parents and siblings in the development of the child's self-image. Trybus (1975) has shown that achievement test results of hearing impaired children have a positive correlation with the economic status of the children's family.

The more aware those of us working with hearing impaired students are of the socioeconomic factors at work in the children's home life and how these factors are similar to or different from those in the general population, the more possible it becomes to provide effective and appropriate educational services to the hearing impaired child and his family.

TABLE - 1

PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN TO MOTHERS OF HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN AND WOMEN IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

NUMBER OF CHILDREN BORN	WOMEN IN THE GENERAL POPULATION[a]	WOMEN WITH AT LEAST ONE HEARING IMPAIRED CHILD
ONE CHILD ONLY	26%	8%
TWO CHILDREN ONLY	32%	22%
THREE CHILDREN ONLY	21%	26%
FOUR CHILDREN ONLY	11%	17%
FIVE CHILDREN OR MORE	11%	28%

[a] U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 301, "Fertility of American Women: June 1975", U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1976 (These percentages are based on women age 15 to 44 who have had at least one child).

TABLE - 2

PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED BY PARENTS OF HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN AND COMPARISON DATA FOR FAMILY HEADS IN THE GENERAL U.S. POPULATION, 1974

YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED	U.S. GENERAL POPULATION[a]		PARENTS OF HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN	
	MALE HEADS OF FAMILIES	FEMALE HEADS OF FAMILIES	FATHERS	MOTHERS
ELEMENTARY				
0-8 YEARS	15%	20%	21%	18%
0-4 YEARS	2	3	4	4
5-7 YEARS	6	9	7	7
8 YEARS	7	8	10	7
HIGH SCHOOL				
1-4 YEARS	53%	64%	52%	66%
1-3 YEARS	15	29	16	21
4 YEARS	38	35	36	45
COLLEGE				
1-4 YEARS (or more)	32%	16%	27%	17%
1-3 YEARS	13	10	15	11
4 YEARS (or more)	19	6	12	6

[a]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 286, "School Enrollment-Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1974," U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1975.

TABLE - 3

PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF OCCUPATIONS OF PARENTS OF HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN AND COMPARISON DATA FOR THE GENERAL U.S. POPULATION

	U.S. GENERAL POPULATION [a]		PARENTS OF HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN	
USUAL OCCUPATION	MALES	FEMALES	FATHERS	MOTHERS
PROFESSIONAL, TECHNICAL & KINDRED WORKERS	14	15	16	15
FARMERS & FARM MANAGERS	3	1	3	--
MANAGERS & ADMINISTRATORS	14	5	9	3
CLERICAL & KINDRED WORKERS	6	35	4	37
SALES WORKERS	6	6	5	3
CRAFT & KINDRED WORKERS	21	2	22	10
OPERATIVES (Including transport)	18	13	19	9
SERVICE WORKERS	8	21	18	23
FARM LABORERS & SUPERVISORS	2	1	2	1
LABORERS (except farm)	8	1	3	--

[a] U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 292,"Population Profile of the United States: 1975," U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1976.

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PARENTAL INCOME:

ITS RELATION TO OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS

Carl J. Jensema

In the spring of 1974, the Office of Demographic Studies (ODS) at Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C., sent extensive questionnaires to the parents and teachers of a nationwide random sample of 1,362 students in special educational programs for the hearing impaired. The questionnaires covered many aspects of the students' background and were returned by 787 parents and 997 teachers.

The questionnaire sent to parents asked the parents to indicate which of five categories best described their annual income: (1) less than $5,000; (2) $5,000 to $9,999; (3) $10,000 to $14,999; (4) $15,000 to $19,999; and (5) $20,000 or more. Responses to this item were obtained from 745 out of the 787 students' parents. This study will outline some relationships between parental income and various characteristics of hearing impaired students.*

Of particular interest is how the distribution of income among parents of hearing impaired students compares with the income distribution of the parents of all students in the United States. Comparative data were found in School Enrollment - Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1974. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Series P-20, No. 286, November 1975, P. 45). Figure 1 shows the relative percent of each of these two groups in the five income categories. The parents of hearing impaired students are disproportionately represented in the lower income categories.

Another significant issue is seen in the distribution of students in each income category by age at onset of hearing loss. Among students whose parents earn less than $5,000 a year, 51% are hearing impaired from birth. By contrast, among the children of parents who earn over $20,000 a year, 83% are hearing impaired from birth. This could mean either that higher income children are deafened less often after birth--due perhaps to better medical care--or it may reflect later detection of hearing loss in lower income families, in which case it becomes difficult to know whether the child was perhaps actually hearing impaired at birth, though undetected.

*NOTE: Some preliminary findings of the data in this study may be found in a previous report by R.J. Trybus (Socioeconomic characteristics of hearing impaired students in special educational programs. Proceedings of the First Gallaudet Symposium on Research in Deafness: The Role of Research and the Cultural and Social Orientation of the Deaf, 1975). Copies of this report are available from the Office of Demographic Studies.

Among the general population of the United States, ethnic background is strongly related to income. The same pattern holds true among hearing impaired students. As parental income increases, the proportion of students who are members of an ethnic minority rapidly decreases. The data contain 179 students who have either black or Spanish-American ethnic backgrounds. Of these, 79% (141) are from families earning less than $10,000 a year.

Despite the general acceptance of the need for early educational services for hearing impaired children, not every hearing impaired child has equal access to these services. This becomes clear when preschool attendance is compared among the different income categories. Figure 2 shows the percentage of students at each parental income level who attended preschool. As income increases, so does the proportion of students who have ever attended a preschool. Furthermore, only 2% of those students in the "less than $5,000" income category were enrolled in preschool at or before the age of one year, but 20% of the students in the "over $20,000" income category were enrolled before their first birthday.

The influence of parental income on enrollment in special educational programs is not limited to the preschool level. Figure 3 shows the proportion of students in each income category who are enrolled in each of four general types of special educational programs for the hearing impaired. As parental income increases, there is a general decline in the proportion of students in residential and day school programs and an increase in the proportion of students enrolled in special education classes and "other" programs.

Figure 4 presents the percentage of students in each income category who are reported by their parents as being current users of a hearing aid. Students from higher income families tend to use hearing aids somewhat more frequently than their less affluent counterparts, especially when student use of a hearing aid in both ears is considered. Information was requested on student use of hearing aids in three distinct environments: (1) in the classroom; (2) in school, but not in the classroom; and (3) at home. All three situations yielded the same basic finding: students from affluent families tend to make greater use of hearing aids. (Differences in the use of hearing aids among the income groups are not due to differences in the distribution of hearing loss. See Karchmer & Kirwin, 1977, for a detailed examination of the use of hearing aids by hearing impaired children.)

Parents were also asked whether each of five communication methods was used in parent-to-student and student-to-parent communication: speech, signs, fingerspelling, writing, and gestures. Speech use showed a marked increase as income increased, while signs and fingerspelling usage remained essentially the same across income levels. The use of writing and gestures decreased as income rose.

The increase in use of speech as income level increased was also found in teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher classroom interaction. The teachers were asked whether speech was used "always," "usually," "sometimes," or "never" in the classroom communication. In both teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher communication categories, speech was used more often with students from the higher income families.

Speech usage and speech intelligibility often go hand in hand. A student who has high speech intelligibility is more likely to communicate through speech than a student whose speech is of low intelligibility. Teachers were asked to rate students according to whether an average hearing person would find the student's speech to be: (1) "Very Intelligible"; (2) "Intelligible"; (3) "Barely Intelligible"; (4) "Not Intelligible"; and (5) "Would Not Attempt to Speak."

For simplicity, consider only the combined categories of "Very Intelligible" and "Intelligible," those students who can communicate with the average hearing person with a minimum of difficulty. Figure 5 illustrates the percentage of students in each income category who meet this qualification. The proportion of students who speak "Very Intelligibly" or "Intelligibly" increases with parental income until the "over $20,000" range is reached and then the average speech intelligibility decreases.

One important consideration in the evaluation of a hearing impaired student's development is his comparative academic progress. Since approximately 67% of the 745 students in this parental income study also have scores on the hearing impaired edition of the 1973 Stanford Achievement Test battery, the relationship between income and academic achievement was examined.

Four subtests from the Stanford battery were selected as being representative measures of a student's basic academic skills: Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics Concepts, and Mathematics Computation. The subtest results were converted to age-percentile scores which are comparable across age groups. The higher the age-percentile score, the higher the student's academic achievement is in comparison with other hearing impaired students of his age. For example, an age-percentile score of 60 would mean that a student would be expected to rank above 59 others in a class of 100 students of his own age. The mean age-percentile score for each income category was computed for each subtest and plotted in Figure 6. Higher parental income tends to be associated with better academic achievement. A closer inspection indicates an important exception to the overall income-achievement trend. In the upper income categories, the vocabulary, reading, and mathematics concepts mean scores drop off somewhat. The mathematics computation scores follow the greater-income-more-achievement tendency at all income levels. Among the four subtests, the mathematics computation subtest is least dependent on language skills.

In conclusion, the basic findings can be briefly reviewed. First, the distribution of income among parents of students in programs for the hearing impaired is lower than among the population of parents in general in this country. It was also found that higher-income students were less likely to have become hearing impaired after birth. They were more likely to have a "white" ethnic background, attend preschool programs, and use hearing aids. More of these students had intelligible speech and they used more speech in communication. Further, income was related to the type of special educational program the student was enrolled in. As income increased, there was also a corresponding trend towards higher academic achievement.

FIGURE 1: PARENTAL INCOME: COMPARISON OF HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS AND U.S. GENERAL STUDENT POPULATION

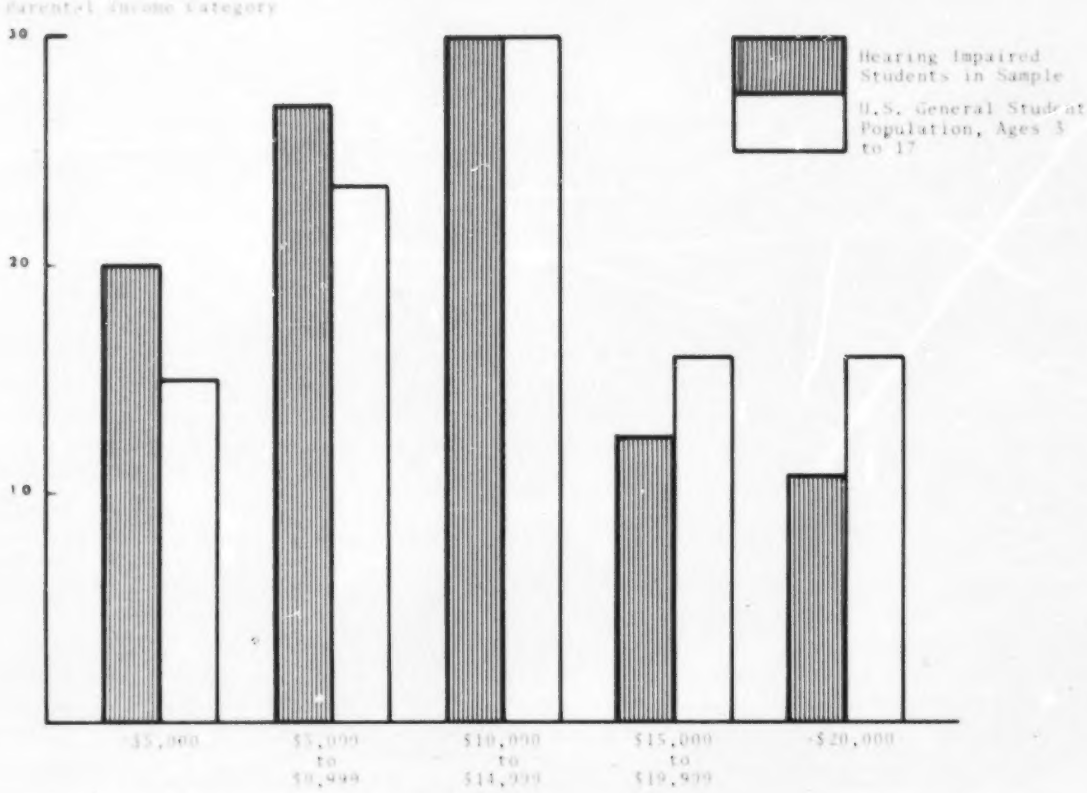


FIGURE 2: PARENTAL INCOME AND PRESCHOOL ATTENDANCE

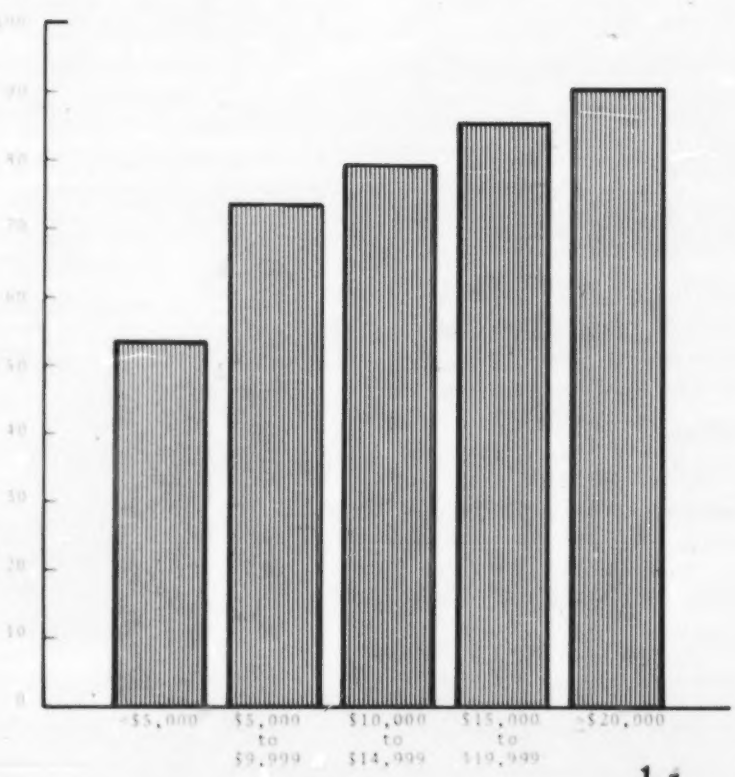


FIGURE 3: PARENTAL INCOME AND TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

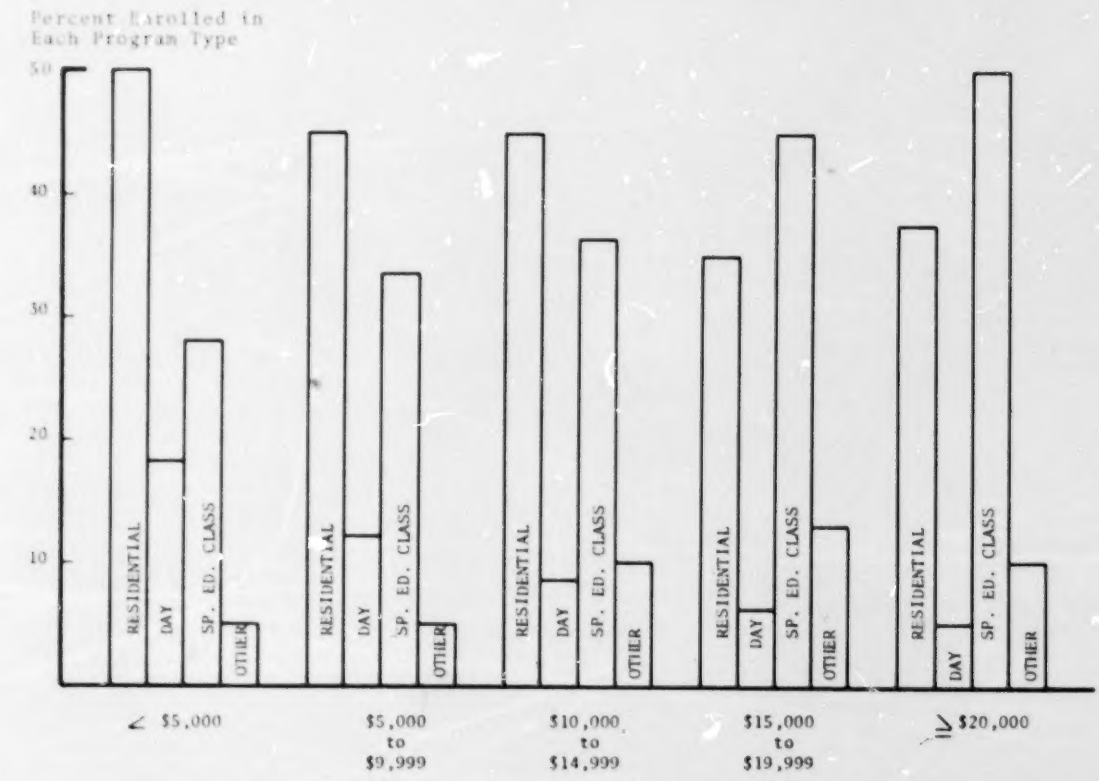


FIGURE 4: PARENTAL INCOME AND USE OF HEARING AIDS

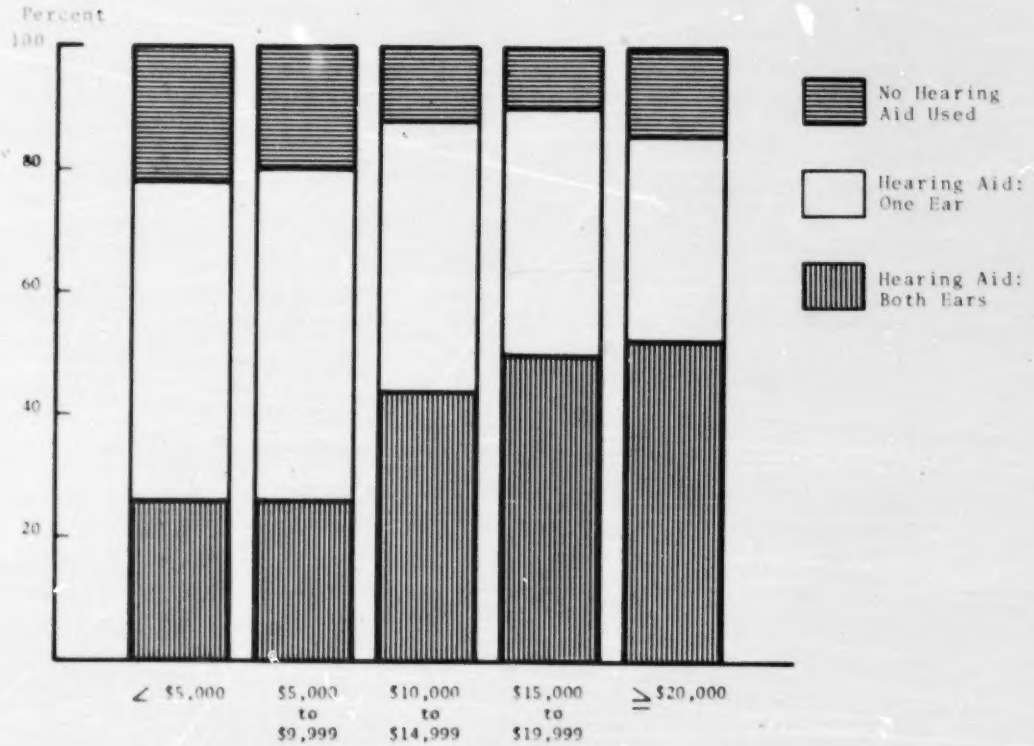


FIGURE 5: PARENTAL INCOME AND SPEECH INTELLIGIBILITY: PERCENT WITH "INTELLIGIBLE" OR "VERY INTELLIGIBLE" SPEECH

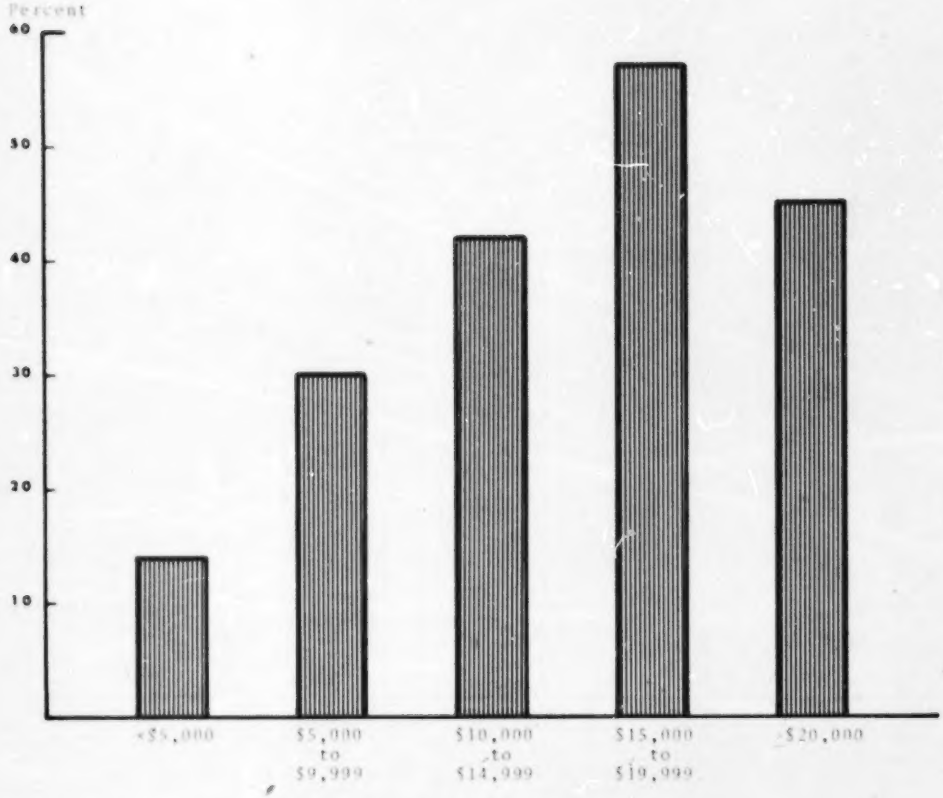
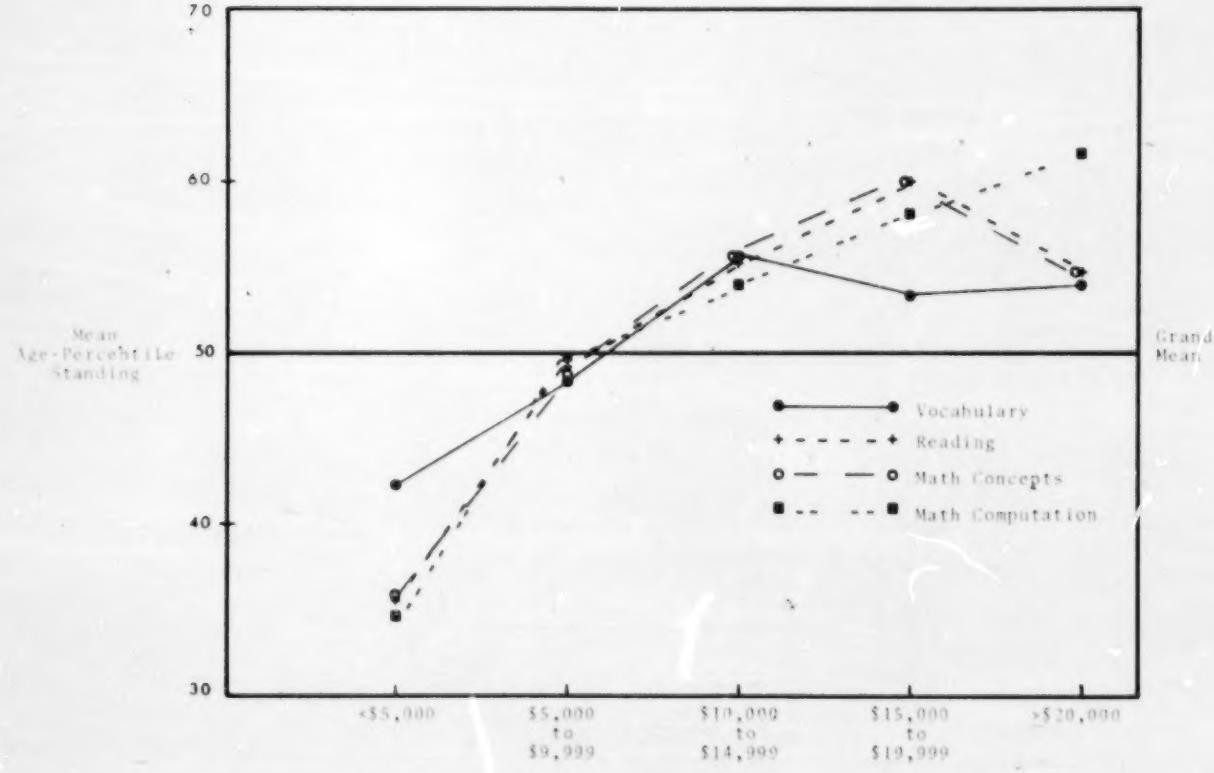


FIGURE 6: PARENTAL INCOME AND ACHIEVEMENT TEST SCORES



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The Office of Demographic Studies was established in 1968 to serve as a national statistical center for the field of deafness. Its purpose is to collect, analyze, and publish information on hearing impaired persons, to provide tabulations, national sampling frames, and other data-oriented services to special educational programs and to professionals in the field, to collaborate in cooperative research projects, and to serve as consultant and resource for projects involving data collection and analysis.

The data collected by the Office are confidential; no information which would permit the identification of an individual or cooperating school as the source of that information is ever released without the necessary written permission. Within the limits of this confidentiality, the Office actively encourages the use of its information and services by administrators, researchers, and others providing services to hearing impaired persons.

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The Office of Demographic Studies has published numerous articles and monographs on hearing impaired students. For further information contact:

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